

# Getting The Job Done Right

By Hyman G. Rickover

I have interviewed more than 14,000 recently graduated college students for jobs in my organization and in nuclear ships. In recent years, a surprising number of applicants, even graduates of engineering schools and the Naval Academy, have become enamored with the study of "management" — some even majoring in this subject.

Almost without exception they are fluent in the jargon of systems analysis, financial manipulation, and quantitative management. They graduate convinced they have learned management techniques that will enable them to administer any job. Yet most seem to have an unrealistic perception of what is actually involved, with little appreciation of the importance of technical knowledge, experience, and hard work.

Many who teach "management" in our universities do their students and society a disservice. By focusing on the techniques of "modern management," they promote the idea that by mastering a few simple principles of how to handle people and situations one can become a universal manager, capable of running any job without having to know much about the work to be managed.

Our factories and companies are increasingly being bought, sold, and operated by professional administrators, lawyers, and financial experts who have little understanding of their products, the technology involved, or the needs of customers. As these professional "managers" reach top corporate positions, others emulate them and avoid technical education in favor of management studies. Our universities should emphasize the importance of a solid grounding in substantive learning and downgrade "management science."

What it takes to do a job will not be learned from management courses. It is principally a matter of experience, the proper attitude, and common sense — none of which can be taught in a classroom.

A manager must make the work challenging and rewarding so that his people will remain with the organization for many years. This allows it to benefit fully from their knowledge, experience, and "corporate" memory.

A major flaw in our system of Government, and even in industry, is the latitude

allowed to do less than is necessary. Too often officials are willing to accept and adapt to situations they know to be wrong. The tendency is to downplay problems instead of actively trying to correct them. Recognizing this, many subordinates give up, contain their views within themselves, and wait for others to take action. When this happens, the manager is deprived of the ex-

perience and ideas of subordinates.

A manager must instill in his people an attitude of personal responsibility for seeing a job properly accomplished. Unfortunately, the sense of personal responsibility for doing a job right seems to be declining, particularly in large organizations where responsibility is broadly distributed.

Unless the individual truly responsible can be identified when something goes wrong, no one has really been responsible. With the advent of modern management theories, it is becoming common for organizations to deal with problems in a collective manner, by dividing programs into sub-programs, with no one left responsible for the entire effort. There is also the tendency to establish more and more levels of management, on the theory that this gives better control.

The man in charge must concern himself with details. If he does not consider them important, neither will his subordinates. Most managers would rather focus on lofty policy matters. But when the details are ignored, the project fails.

To maintain proper control one must have simple and direct means to find out what is going on. There are many ways of doing this; all involve constant drudgery. For this reason, those in charge often create "management information systems" designed to extract from the operation the details a busy executive needs to know. Often the process is carried too far. The top official then loses touch with his people and with the work that is actually going on.

I am not against business education. A knowledge of accounting, finance, business law, and the like can be of value in a business environment. What I do believe is harmful is the impression often created by those who teach "management" that one will be able to manage any job simply by applying certain management techniques, together with some simple academic rules of how to manage people and situations.

There is concern today over the apparent decline in U.S. productivity. In searching for its causes, we should not overlook the impact of the many professional administrators who run large corporations. Though trained in management at our leading universities, they are often unskilled in the technical aspects of the company. As a result, they manage largely in the terms they learned at school. Technical, operational, and production issues are quickly reduced to issues of numbers and dollars,

upon which they apply their management techniques. Although in this way they may achieve financial benefits, an overemphasis on short-term profits often ignores broader issues such as efficient production or planning for the future.

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Adm. Hyman G. Rickover, 81, who is to leave his post as the Navy's chief nuclear officer in January, at President Reagan's request, recently delivered these remarks, excerpted here, to the Columbia University School of Engineering and Applied Science.

*Saw on Rickover*  
108